

God has allowed Satan to destroy Job's possessions and health. Now Job's suffering continues when three well-intentioned friends visit him and misdiagnose the reason for Job's adversity. We often do the same thing when we think we know why other people are having problems. However, God alone knows the true reason why adversity comes to different individuals whether they are righteous or not.

¹¹ Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.

Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) had heard of the bad things that had happened to Job and so they got together and agreed to go see Job on a particular day. They had noble intentions because they wanted to mourn with Job and to try to comfort him, as good friends should.

¹² And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

“And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not” – Job may have still been sitting in the ashes scraping his sores with a piece of broken pottery (v. 8). When Job's three friends were approaching they saw Job but didn't recognize him, probably because they didn't expect to see him there and the sores covering his body and disfiguring his face caused him to not look like himself. Apparently they were not prepared to see Job like this because his situation was worse than they expected.

“they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven” – When they got close enough to recognize that this poor suffering man they saw was indeed Job, it broke their hearts to see him in this condition. They began mourning over Job's predicament and expressed themselves in the traditional ways of weeping, tearing their clothes and sprinkling dust on their heads.

¹³ So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that *his* grief was very great.

As good friends they shared in his grief by sitting on the ground with him, fulfilling **Rom 12:15** - *“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”* The Hebrew word for “grief” means *“pain (physical and mental), sorrow.”* They saw Job's physical suffering from the sores and the mental anguish from the sorrow at losing his family and all his wealth. Out of respect they did not speak until Job did, which was not until seven days later. Also, seven days was the usual time for mourning for the dead (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13).

Job 3: Chapter 3 records Job's first words to his friends after the week of silence. He curses the day he was born and wishes that he had died in the womb. He says that death would have been better for him rather than to have lived to see this day of suffering.

Job 4

¹ Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, ² *If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking?*

Eliphaz cautiously responds to Job's opening statement that he wished for death by asking if it would upset Job if they “assayed” (attempted) to talk with him. He may have merely been trying to be polite with this question because he quickly follows it up with the statement that no one could keep his mouth shut after hearing what Job had said. In Eliphaz's opinion Job's words required a response. Since the three friends had already decided that Job's suffering was because of some sin he had committed (more on this later), no doubt Eliphaz had expected to hear a confession of guilt instead of Job cursing the day he was born.

³ Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. ⁴ Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. ⁵ But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.

“Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands” – Eliphaz states that previously Job had been the one in the position of giving advice and encouragement to those who needed help in the midst of their troubles.

“Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees” – Job was the one helping hold up those who were falling and giving strength to those succumbing to adverse circumstances and could not stand on their own.

“But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled” – But the tables have turned and now it is Job who is the one suffering adversity. It's easy to give advice to others when they are having problems and we think we know what they need to do. However, it's different when we are the one having the problems. The advice we've given to others seems to be inadequate when it's our problems. This seems to be what Eliphaz is saying to Job. Job has advised others in their troubles but now that it has come to him, Eliphaz says “thou faintest” and “thou art troubled.” Shouldn't the advice that Job gave others also work for him now that he's the one with the troubles?

⁶ Is not *this* thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? ⁷ Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? ⁸ Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

Eliphaz now speaks from a common belief that many have that is based on our short-sighted human nature. We naturally tend to believe that people get what they deserve. We want to believe that wicked people will always get caught and suffer for their sins and righteous people will prosper in the blessings of God. While God does promise that these two assertions will be true in eternity, they do not always come true on earth. Jesus' disciples had this same belief when they asked about the reason for a man's blindness: **John 9:1-3** *"1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."* The disciples assumed that the man's blindness had to be the result of sin.

"Is not *this* thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?" - Previously, Job was the helper of those with troubles but now he's the one with troubles. What has changed? Eliphaz mistakenly points to Job's fear, confidence and hope in God as well as his uprightness as being the problem. If Job feared God as he should, had confidence and hope in God as he should, and was as upright as he should be, then of course these problems would never have come to Job.

"Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" - Eliphaz expresses the mistaken belief that if we are faithful to God then we will not suffer any hardships and problems will never come our way. This belief also says the inverse: if we are suffering hardship then it must be because we have done something wrong. Now, God does bless our faithfulness but He has never promised that we would not suffer adversity.

"Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" - Eliphaz continues with the false notion that righteous people never suffer and the unrighteous always do. He says his observation has been that those who engage in iniquity and wickedness never get away with it and will always suffer for their sins. This idea is not always true in the short term because many wicked people seem to get away with sin while the righteous seem to suffer despite their trust in God. The psalmist fretted over this observation in **Psalm 73** when he said *"2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. 3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."* He continues to describe his frustration with how the wicked seem to get away with their wickedness and even prosper while the righteous suffer. His frustration ended, however, when he looked at the situation with the eye of faith: *"17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."* The psalmist realized that the wicked will not escape from God's justice in eternity.

Job 5-15: These chapters continue the cycle of each of Job's friends speaking and Job responding to their words. The over-arching theme of what the three friends say is that Job must have committed one or more grievous sins or else he would not be suffering as he is. Their solution to Job's problems is that he should come clean and repent. The theme of Job's responses is that he has not committed a sin worthy of the amount of suffering he is undergoing and that he wishes God would explain the reason for his suffering.

Job 16

¹ Then Job answered and said, ² I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all.

Job responds to Eliphaz's latest speech and says that he's heard it all before. They have not said anything new or helpful so he calls them "miserable comforters." The Hebrew word for "miserable" means *"troublesome; wearisome; toil; labor."* Job is saying that comforters are supposed to make you feel better but they have done the opposite and made his suffering worse. If the reason for them being there was to give comfort to him then they have failed.

³ Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? ⁴ I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you.

"Shall *vain* [wind; air] words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest?" - The word for "vain" means "wind" or "air" and so he's asking when there will be an end of words that are just a bunch of hot air. Then he asks what is motivating them to speak when they have nothing meaningful to say.

"I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead" - If their situations were reversed, Job says he also could speak an abundance of words and yet say nothing just as easily as they are doing.

"I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you" - He also could speak a mountain of words saying what he thought about their situation and shake his head in disapproval.

⁵ But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief. ⁶ Though I speak, my grief is not asswaged: and though I forbear, what am I eased?

"But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief" - Job says that instead of speaking vain words, his words would be helpful and would lessen their grief, unlike what their words have been doing to him.

"Though I speak, my grief is not asswaged: and though I forbear, what am I eased?" - Job now looks to his own situation and it seems that his grief is just as severe whether he speaks or remains silent. He is not able to comfort himself.

⁷ But now he hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company.

The "he" seems to be God and Job acknowledges that what God has allowed him to endure has worn him out to the point of giving up. He then seems to be speaking to God directly and says that God has destroyed ("made desolate") his entire household ("company").